

What Should Be Included In Your Master Plan?

Information is the key to successful planning. A master plan is no better than the data on which it is based. Most of the information included in your plan will be based on the background studies that you prepare. Ultimately, those background studies are presented in chapter format in the master plan.

Most chapters or sections in a master plan include such topics as the natural environment, the local economy, housing, transportation, community facilities, and land use. The goals and objectives guiding the plan, when combined with the vision statements, should provide a clear view of the kind of future your community hopes to achieve. This, in turn, should be reflected in the plan's future land use section – the part of the plan that starts to “put on the ground” the community's preferred future.

State law prescribes that two mandatory sections be included in all master plans. Currently, there is no limit on the total number of sections, nor on the type and amount of information that can be included in your master plan. That is strictly your decision.

Mandatory Sections:

RSA 674:2 II provides that a master plan shall include, at a minimum, the following two mandatory sections:

(a) Vision

Serves to direct the other sections of the plan. This section shall contain a set of statements that articulate the desires of the citizens affected by the master plan, not only for their locality, but for the region and the whole state. It shall contain a set of guiding principles and priorities to implement that vision (for more information, see Chapter 5, “Phase II: Community Visioning”). Click here for a step-by-step guide to the community visioning process.



*Make no small plans, they have
no magic to stir men's (or women's)
blood...Let your watchword be order
and your beacon beauty.*

- Daniel Burnham

(b) Land Use

The section upon which all the following sections shall be based. This section shall translate the vision statements into physical terms. Based on a study of population, economic activity, and natural, historical, and cultural resources, it shall show existing conditions and the proposed locations, extent, and intensity of future land use.

The vision and land use sections form the backbone of the master plan. The studies of population, economic activity, and natural, historical, and cultural resources all lead eventually to the designation of future land development scenarios and the development of a future land use map. This map depicts the general locations, types, and intensity of the community's future land use (for more information, see Chapter 7, "Phase IV: Building the Plan"). **Click here for a step-by-step guide to developing a future land use map.**

Another common element of master plans is the build-out analysis, which is useful for mid-size towns experiencing rapid growth and a dwindling supply of land. This analysis is performed to show how buildable land in a given community could be developed based on the community's existing land use regulations, thereby providing a good idea of the potential for future growth. The build-out analysis can also be used as a tool for evaluating future land use scenarios and developing a future land use map (for more information, see Chapter 10, "Tools and Techniques").

Click here for a step-by-step guide to conducting a build-out analysis.

Other Master Plan Sections:

RSA 674:2 III provides that a master plan may also include a combination of the following thirteen other sections:

1. Transportation
2. Community facilities
3. Economic development*
4. Natural resources*
5. Natural hazards
6. Recreation

7. Utility and public service
8. Cultural and historical resources*
9. Regional concerns
10. Neighborhoods
11. Community design
12. Housing
13. Implementation

**Some elements of these sections may be part of the mandatory land use section in accordance with RSA 674:2. This statute requires that a study of population, economic activity, and natural, historical, and cultural resources be prepared as part of the land use section.*

Generally, the specific sections that you select to include in your master plan will be dependent upon your community's needs; but in all cases, it is highly recommended that your master plan include an implementation section.

The requirements of RSA 674:2 III regarding each of the above thirteen sections are described in the following pages. A summary of what should be addressed in each of these sections is also outlined in the most recent NH OEP Technical Bulletin 3, Master Planning, Summer 2003. Studies related to each of these subjects, or references to them, are generally included in most master plans (for more information about each subject, refer to Chapter 12, "Bibliography/Resources").

1. Transportation

This section considers all pertinent modes of transportation and provides a framework adequate for local needs and for coordination with regional and state transportation plans. Suggested items to be considered may include, but are not limited to, public transportation, park and ride facilities, and bicycle routes, paths, or both.

The basic purpose of this section is to evaluate all modes of transportation within a community and to identify and evaluate major transportation problems and issues.

There are several important reasons to include a transportation section in your master plan. First, roads are one of the key factors in shaping the growth of a community. Development can occur only where there are roads. Where there is a heavy concentration of roads, there is typically a greater quantity of development. Where there is a rural roadway system, there is usually a more scattered development pattern. Second, road maintenance and reconstruction expenditures represent a major cost to communities. A cost-effective road improvement program minimizes local and state highway expenditures.

Since land use and transportation issues are directly related, this section should identify transportation concerns in the context of land use issues where appropriate. Many local officials and planning boards express concern about transportation improvements that tend to promote haphazard growth or sprawl. They seek creative land use solutions to prevent sprawl and thereby manage and preserve transportation improvements for future users.

Transportation planning is a local, regional, and state responsibility. The transportation section should provide a framework adequate for local improvement needs and for coordination with regional and state transportation plans. It should not only address vehicular traffic, but also consider alternative modes of transportation such as pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit. In addition, the effect of the transportation system on the environmental quality of the community should also be considered. Many communities prepare a separate bicycle and pedestrian plan, which is included by reference as part of the master plan.

There are many ways to go about preparing a transportation section. Generally it should include a brief historical context for your city or town's transportation planning to date, including a list of existing and proposed improvements, as well as an overview of issues and concerns. It should also include a generalized inventory of the existing roadway system and highway and functional classification systems, identifying the various charac-

teristics of each section as well as associated traffic volume ranges and issues. Maps should be included depicting this information. A section on alternative transportation modes and an evaluation of your community's road surface management system, if applicable, should also be included. In addition, information about intersection level of service and improvement needs, general traffic hazards, accidents, parking, environmental and aesthetic concerns, and funding needs should be included. Finally, this section should include recommendations.

Helpful Hint: While this section is optional, it is highly recommended if your community is experiencing traffic congestion and there is a significant need for road and intersection improvements. The provision of adequate transportation facilities and services is an important local, regional, and statewide concern. Also, there is a direct relationship between transportation and land use. If your community lacks the expertise or knowledge to prepare a transportation section, a consultant or your regional planning commission can be hired to provide these services. Information can also be obtained from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation web site at: <http://www.nh.gov/dot/>.

2. Community Facilities

This section identifies facilities to support the future land use pattern of subparagraph II (b), addresses the projected needs of the community, and coordinates with other local governments' special districts and school districts, as well as with state and federal agencies that have multi-jurisdictional impacts.

One of the primary responsibilities of local government is to provide adequate community facilities and services for its residents and businesses. The availability and quality of these services is often a major factor in determining the quality of life and general character of a community. Therefore, it is important to consider the effect population and economic growth will have on a community's ability to provide essential public facilities and services for its residents.

The competing demands of maintaining existing facilities and constructing new facilities to service future development can overwhelm the capacity of a municipality to respond effectively to growth. Likewise, the lack of adequate facilities and services can impede future growth and compromise efforts to encourage economic development.

Thus, the purpose of this section is to examine the capacity and deficiencies of your community's existing facilities and services and to identify improvements needed now and in the future. In addition, it should identify the public facilities and services that may be needed to support the future land use vision of your community, linking directly back to the vision and land use chapters of your plan.

Community facilities typically include mostly municipal and public facilities and services. Generally, an inventory is prepared of the community's fire protection and emergency services; police and communications departments; parks and recreational facilities and services; other community recreational facilities, like the YMCA; town or city hall offices; other town or city-owned buildings; community facilities such as colleges and universities; library facilities and services; public works department facilities and services, including solid waste, public water and sewer systems, and highways; cemeteries; and public education. The inventory can be compiled in either or both of two ways: through the distribution of a detailed community facilities survey and/or through personal interviews with department heads and the chairs of all the relevant boards and commissions that have authority over aforementioned facilities and services, such as parks and recreation or the library.

Public education is often separated out in an individual section in the master plan because of its complexity and the need to consider school facility needs in the light of enrollment projections and other considerations. While utilities and public services are entitled to constitute a section of their own, frequently it is sufficient simply to include them in the community facilities section of your plan.

As you go about preparing this section, you should always keep in mind the type, as well as the amount, of information needed. Many communities, particularly large towns and cities, prepare detailed community facilities needs assessments (including space and locational assessments) for capital projects and capital improvement programming needs. However, the same level of detail is not necessary in a master plan. More detailed studies can be referenced or utilized, but the primary task should be to prepare a generalized inventory describing each facility and service type and identifying future needs.

This task can easily be accomplished by preparing a community facilities survey (**click here for an example**). Using this survey along with population projections, you should be able to identify current needs and project the type and level of services that will be needed in the future to support your community's growth and development. A number of adequate public facilities standards are available for each type of community facility and service (for more information, see Chapter 12, "Bibliography/Resources"). Use these standards to assess available capacity and identify current deficiencies and future needs.

A cost-of-community-services study is not a necessary requirement in the community facilities section. However, many communities are beginning to take a look at the cost-revenue impacts of broad land use categories on a community. They are engaging consultants to prepare studies that set the stage for future impact fee ordinances (see Chapter 12, "Bibliography/Resources," for references). This information is helpful in providing an assessment of a community's fiscal situation with regard to different types of land use at a particular point in time. It might also help to justify certain land and economic development policies that favor increased industrial development as a means to help reduce the local tax burden. Generally such policies can be justified in a master plan as part of the land use analysis and the development of the future land use plan.

A community facilities section in a master plan can be organized by each facility type and depart-

ment, or it can be set up in a general issues, goals, and recommendations format, with most of the inventory and data included in the plan's appendix. In either case, the key information and findings should be described in this section.

Helpful Hint: *While it is optional, it is highly recommended that you include a community facilities section in your master plan if your community is growing and there is a need for new or expanded facilities and services. There are always going to be facility needs and concerns in a community. Ultimately these issues need to be identified, and future projects planned, through a Capital improvement program (CIP). This section can also be titled "Municipal and School Facilities" or "Public Facilities and Utilities," depending upon inclusion of education and public utilities information.*

3. Economic Development

This section proposes actions to suit the community's economic goals, given its economic strengths and weaknesses in the region.

The main purpose of the economic development section of a master plan is to analyze the local economy. Economic health is vital to a community, which suffers without it. In most cases, a municipality will not experience growth unless its local and regional economy is prospering.

An economic assessment is a general overall evaluation of a community's economic conditions. It may include an inventory of existing businesses, though typically it does not include a detailed description of each business or industry. An assessment generally summarizes the products manufactured within the community and the number and kinds of manufacturing firms and commercial services in existence, as well as trends in employment. Businesses gained over the past decade are usually mentioned, and the future of the local economy is briefly discussed.

An economic base study, on the other hand, can be used to help a community create policies and programs that can facilitate economic growth.

First, a detailed evaluation of the community's economy is conducted. The community's economic strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, are also identified. Next, a detailed inventory of all the businesses within the community is conducted, classifying each business relative to its market position within the local and regional economy. This inventory assesses how people in the community earn a living and the kinds of businesses and industries the community needs and could support, considering existing conditions and labor skills. The economic base study also includes employment projections. These estimates can provide a useful benchmark for the community in planning for housing, schools, utilities, and other services.

As part of the economic development section, a community and its economy should be compared to its neighbors, other similar-sized communities, the county or region, and the state as a whole. Economic studies are most useful to local decision makers when such comparisons have been made.

In addition, an economic development section should include a statement of economic goals and objectives that summarize the improvements local residents and businesses would like to see. Economic goals typically focus on expanding the local property tax base and increasing income and employment opportunities by diversifying the local economy. In rural communities, a major goal might be to provide good jobs for young adults, so that they do not have to leave the area to find employment opportunities. Economic objectives might concentrate on specific incentives, such as property tax breaks and public funding of sewer and water lines to attract and retain the kind of businesses and jobs the community wants.

The economic development section should, at the very least, include a basic introduction to, and description of, the community's economic issues and concerns. This introduction should be followed by a general economic assessment or economic base study that describes current and future conditions and provides a summary of findings and recommendations.

Helpful Hint: *It is mandatory that you prepare a study of economic activity as part of the master plan's land use section (see RSA 674:2 II. B.). If a detailed economic study containing a wide variety of charts, tables, and projections has been prepared, this information can be included in an appendix and only the most important data shown in the economic development section or the land use section of your plan. If municipal financial information is included as part of the economic analysis, the section can be titled "Economic Conditions and Municipal Finances." It is recommended that towns experiencing poor economic growth prepare this more detailed economic development section to supplement the basic study required for the land use section. If your community lacks the expertise or knowledge to prepare such a study, a consultant or your regional planning commission can be hired to provide these services. Assistance can also be obtained from the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) at: <http://www.dred.state.nh.us>*

4. Natural Resources

This section identifies and inventories any critical or sensitive areas or resources, not only those in the local community, but also those shared with abutting communities. It provides a factual basis for any land development regulations that may be enacted to protect natural areas. A key component in preparing this section is to identify any conflicts with plans of abutting communities. The natural resources section of the master plan should include a local water resources management and protection plan as specified by RSA 4-C:22.

A study of a community's natural environment is an essential element of a master plan. Some of the most pressing environmental concerns are: (1) open space protection; (2) preservation of agricultural lands and floodplains; (3) water resources; (4) wetlands, wildlife habitats, and other ecologically significant areas; and (5) hillsides and steep slopes. Natural resource information is needed to provide a factual basis for any land development regulations that may be enacted to protect your community's natural areas.

Natural resources include the soil, water, forests, minerals, geologic formations, and plant and animal species found within a community's borders. An inventory of the quantity and quality of these resources can help a community identify areas that are suitable for development, areas that can support limited development, and areas that should be protected from development (refer to the Basic Natural Resource Inventory section in Chapter 6, "Phase III: Building the Information System," for more information). It is recommended that this inventory include information on specific sites and land ownership patterns. Ownership patterns show who owns the natural resources and the number and size of the parcels. Land parcels can be identified from local tax maps.

Once an inventory has been completed, the natural resources can be prioritized for protection based on a number of factors, such as size, rarity, diversity, and fragility and whether the resource is renewable or irreplaceable. A community's natural resources can also be rated based on how threatened the site or resource is with respect to development encroachment. Your regional planning commission (**click here for list of regional planning commissions**) may have already worked with your community in prioritizing your natural resources as part of the State of New Hampshire, Department of Environmental Services (DES) Regional Environmental Protection Program (REPP). (Information about the REPP can be found at: <http://www.des.state.nh.us/REPP/>)

Most, if not all, of the natural resources in your community should be presented on a map or a series of maps along with a brief narrative description. Typical maps might include a topographical map; a wetlands map; a water resources map; an aquifer map; a special flood hazards map; and a special features map (for more information, see the Basic Natural Resources Inventory section in Chapter 6, "Phase III: Building the Information System"). When these maps are combined, a series of summary analysis maps can be prepared, from which a map of environmental sensitive areas and a map of natural and community hazards can then be developed. These summary analysis maps

will assist you in the formulation of your community's future land use map. **Click here to launch the step-by-step guide to preparing a future land use map.**

There is no one correct way to organize this chapter, but generally it should include an overview of existing conditions, identify issues and concerns, and discuss the need to protect the community's natural resources. It should also include a summary and recommendations.

Helpful Hint: *It is mandatory that a study of natural resources be included in the land use section (see RSA 674:2 II. B.). If a detailed natural resources inventory containing a wide variety of data, charts, and tables has been prepared, this information can be included in an appendix, with only the most important data shown in the natural resources or the land use section of the plan. If your community has adopted an open space plan, this plan should be referenced as part of the master plan. If your community has adopted a local water resources management and protection plan as specified in RSA 4-C:22, this plan also should be referenced as part of the master plan.*

5. Natural Hazards

This section documents the physical characteristics, severity, frequency, and extent of any potential natural hazards to the community. It should identify those elements of the built environment at risk from natural hazards, as well as the extent of present and future vulnerability that may result from current zoning and development policies.

The natural hazards section should prioritize the various risks facing your community and then look at possible ways to avoid or minimize undesired effects. The result is a hazard mitigation plan and strategy for implementation. Your community's current zoning and subdivision regulations may in fact encourage development in areas where natural disasters have occurred in the past and have the potential of occurring again.

The addition of a natural hazards section to a master plan is a fairly new development, although occurrences of flooding and other natural disasters

have been documented in master plans of the past. The primary focus of the natural hazards section is to address the need for hazard protection and mitigation in community planning. Communities that wish to become eligible for hazard mitigation grants are required to prepare a detailed hazard mitigation plan under the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (for more information about hazard mitigation plans contact the New Hampshire Bureau of Emergency Management at: <http://www.nhoem.state.nh.us>). This plan is typically prepared separately from the master plan. However, there is no reason why it cannot be referenced and/or summarized as part of your master plan.

The organization of the natural hazards section will depend upon the types of natural hazards that are included in your plan. Generally speaking, it should be organized around each identified hazard – the extent and severity of the hazard and its threat to the community. A summary and recommendations should also be included.

Helpful Hint: *If your community has adopted a hazard mitigation plan, it should be referenced and summarized as part of your master plan. If not, include a natural hazards section, particularly if your community has experienced repeated flooding, wildfires, or other natural disasters. (Including a natural hazards section in your master plan is not sufficient in itself to qualify your town for hazard mitigation funding.)*

6. Recreation

This section covers existing recreation areas and addresses future recreation needs.

Parks and recreational facilities are major community features. Parks provide open space for residents and visitors and enhance a community's appearance. The amount of parkland needed or desired will vary widely from one community to the next. This is also true for the type and size of various recreational facilities.

To determine existing and future park and recreation needs, this section should document the number of acres of parkland and show all park

and recreational facilities on a map. It should also describe the types of recreational facilities located at both the parks and public schools and their conditions. These facilities might include playgrounds, swing sets, tennis and basketball courts, swimming pools, baseball and softball fields, picnic areas, nature trails, bicycle paths, and other facilities. This will provide some initial idea of whether new park and recreation facilities are needed.

It is relatively easy to describe existing recreation areas and facilities and to show them on a map. It is not so easy, however, to address what your community's future recreation needs might be. The need for park and recreation facilities can be assessed in a number of ways, including the drawing of comparisons with state and national standards. Local officials also can be called on to assess need. State and national standards were developed in the early 1980s by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), based on national perceptions at the time (see NRPA's web site at: <http://www.nrpa.org/>). They reflect broad objectives gleaned from the stated preferences of large groups of people. Consequently, they do not take into account the particular circumstances and conditions of any specific community.

Your community's need for recreational facilities will be different from national and state norms due to its demographic characteristics and the variety of recreational opportunities available nearby. The most accurate indication of the demand and need for facilities is based on the needs expressed by residents and the observations of local officials in your community. This information can be obtained directly from your community survey (for information about community surveys, see Chapter 10, "Tools and Techniques").

Be aware that New Hampshire has mostly abandoned use of state and national recreational standards in favor of the NRPA's 1996 publication called "Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines." This publication has made

a specific attempt to lead communities away from the previous population ratios, stating that communities should focus instead on determining their own desired "levels of service" for different recreational facilities. While the population-based recreation standards were presented in the state's 1994 SCORP and 1995 "Guide to Municipal Recreation," these standards are not part of the state's recently completed 2003-2007 SCORP (this document is available at <http://nh.gov/oep/resources.htm>). The New Hampshire Office of Energy Planning hopes to update the 1995 "Guide to Municipal Recreation" over the next several years. (For more information about these standards also see the NH OEP web site at: <http://www.nh.gov/oep>.)

It is fairly common, particularly in smaller communities, to find the recreation analysis included as part of the community facilities section. The preparation of a separate recreation section, however, may be necessary for larger communities and for those communities that are experiencing recreation problems and concerns.

Organization of this section in a master plan should begin with a brief introduction and overview of the municipality's parks and recreation program and a review of the general park and recreation issues of the community. This should be followed by the inventory and needs assessment of existing facilities and programs, an identification of future park and recreational facilities, and a summary and recommendations.

Helpful Hint: *While a recreation section in your master plan is optional, it is highly recommended if the provision of adequate park and recreation facilities is a major concern within the community. Otherwise, you can include a parks and recreation section within the community facilities chapter of your plan. NH OEP's new 2003-2007 SCORP guide should be used as a reference.*

7. Utility and Public Service

This section analyzes the need for and shows the present and future general location of existing and anticipated public and private utilities, both local and regional, including telecommunications utilities, their supplies, and facilities for distribution and storage.

A utility and public service section is meant to document existing service conditions, distribution areas, and system capacities and, where utility expansions are proposed, to address existing needs and anticipated future growth and development. Each of these utilities can be described and mapped in a general sense. It is not necessary to obtain detailed utility maps at the parcel level.

The utility and public service section is needed primarily to support the future land use plan of your community, as it links directly to the vision and land use chapters. Typically an inventory is prepared and each utility and public service is described. Much of this information can be collected as part of the community facilities survey of municipally owned facilities. It may be necessary to obtain information about electric service, natural gas, and telecommunication facilities directly from those utilities, unless this information is shown on the community's public utility maps.

One of the most important goals of this section is to determine the capacity needs and future demands of municipally owned public water and sewer systems, if such systems exist. Typically this determination is based on population and housing projections, as well as such land use considerations as the amount and location of commercial and industrial building space. In smaller communities, this information can be collected and easily included in a master plan. In larger municipalities, however, separate facility studies are usually prepared, in accordance with the size and complexity of the systems. If this is the case, these studies can and should be referenced in the utility and public service section.

The organization of the utility and public service section should include a brief description of each utility, existing usage, service distribution, capacity, proposed improvements, and identified future expansion

needs. Current expansion policies for new development should also be described, as well as overall findings and recommendations. It is not absolutely critical that information about such private utilities as electricity, natural gas, and telecommunications be included. The most important utility information concerns the public and private water and sewer systems in the community. Without these basic services, economic growth and development cannot occur.

***Helpful Hint:** The inclusion of a utility and public service section in your master plan is extremely helpful in ensuring the timing and coordination of future utility expansions, particularly municipal water and sewer systems, with your community's future land use vision and plan. Information about utility and public services can be combined with the community facilities chapter in your master plan, rather than set apart as an additional chapter. The utility and public services section can be focused primarily on municipally owned utilities.*

8. Cultural and Historical Resources

This section identifies cultural and historical resources and protects them for rehabilitation or preservation from the impact of other land use regulations, such as those involving housing and transportation.

The basic purpose of this section is to consider how to preserve a community's historical character and enhance its cultural resources in order to meet the needs of present and future residents. It should also help shape the development of the future land use plan and map.

It is likely that your local historical society has prepared an inventory of properties and buildings eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (see web site at: <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/>) as well as the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places (see web site at: <http://www.state.nh.us/nhdhr/barnstatereg.html>). This survey of properties and buildings should be mapped and then used to help formulate the future land use plan and map. If there are areas of conflict, those issues should be explored and addressed as part of the development of your master plan.

Additionally, your regional planning commission may have prepared local resource protection priorities data layers, which show significant properties and sites within your community for future protection. These layers were compiled as part of NH DES's Regional Environmental Planning Program (REPP). The data layers, updated in fiscal year 2004, were initially designed to assist the state's Land and Community Heritage and Investment Program (LCHIP). The LCHIP web site is located at: <http://www.lchip.org/>.

The cultural and historical resources section should also be used to document and address your community's cultural and historic preservation programs. Even though historic districts are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, they may not be locally zoned as such. If your community has not yet established a heritage commission or a historic district commission as provided for by RSA 674:44 or 674:46, this issue can be addressed in your master plan.

While there is no established organizational format for the cultural and historical resources section, it should start off with a brief introduction and history, leading into a discussion of the community's primary cultural and historic preservation issues and concerns. A summary of findings and recommendations should also be prepared.

Helpful Hint: *It is mandatory that a study of historical and cultural resources be included as part of a master plan's land use section (see RSA 674:2 II. B.). If the community already has an inventory of historic properties, do not prepare a new survey. However, if no inventory exists, this cost should be factored in as part of the work program. A study of historic and cultural resources can be addressed as a separate section, or it can be included as part of the natural resources, open space, or recreation sections of your master plan. It can also be included as part of an overall conservation or preservation chapter. Historic preservation assistance can also be obtained from the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources at: <http://www.state.nh.us/nhdhrl/>.*

9. Regional Concerns

This section describes the specific areas in the municipality of significant regional interest. These areas may include resources wholly contained within the municipality or bordering, shared with, or both, neighboring municipalities. Items to be considered may include, but are not limited to, public facilities, natural resources, economic and housing potential, transportation, agriculture, and open space. The intent of this section is to promote regional awareness in managing growth, while fulfilling local vision statements.

The primary purpose of this section, as stated above, is to consider the regional impacts that specific areas within your community may have on neighboring municipalities. These involve issues such as public facilities, natural resources, economics and housing, transportation, agriculture, and open space. The impact or range of influence of these concerns can cross municipal lines.

The regional concerns section in a master plan typically includes a brief description of the regional setting of the community, identifies the names of bordering towns and cities, and documents the primary access routes to a community and their size. It also identifies the specific areas within a community that face issues or concerns of a regional nature that cross community lines.

It is important to note that RSA 674:1 also provides that a master plan may include consideration of any areas outside the boundaries of the municipality that, in the judgment of the planning board, bear a relation to, or have an impact on, the planning of the municipality. The regional concerns section of a master plan provides an opportunity to explore such areas.

While there are no specific guidelines for when, and to what extent, a planning board may consider specific areas outside its jurisdiction in a master plan setting, the key words here are that it must "bear a relation to" or "have an impact upon" the planning of the community. Thus, the planning board must exercise some judgment in this area.

Helpful Hint: While a regional concerns section in a master plan is optional, it is highly recommended that it be included if a community has issues and concerns of a regional nature, or if there are areas in neighboring towns or cities that are having an impact on the community. If there are no pressing regional issues or concerns, do not prepare a separate section. Basic information about the regional setting of a community can be addressed in the introduction or land use section of the plan.

10. Neighborhood Plan

This section focuses on a specific geographical area of local government that includes substantial residential development. This section is a part of the local master plan and shall be consistent with it. No neighborhood plan shall be adopted until a local master plan is adopted.

The primary purpose of this section is to provide a means for the incorporation of small area plans, or neighborhood plans, within the master plan (for more information about small area master plans, see Different Ways to Plan in Chapter 9, “Basics of Planning Theory”). It might be necessary to prepare a detailed plan for a specific geographical area or neighborhood within a community because significant changes are occurring or anticipated.

Alternatively, the community may be divided into regions or neighborhoods, and detailed plans prepared for these areas as part of the master plan. Although such plans contain specific recommendations for the regions or neighborhoods being studied, they must be consistent with the overall master plan. For that reason, the provision has been added stating that “no neighborhood plan shall be adopted until a local master plan is adopted.” This ensures that the individual neighborhood plans agree with the community-wide plan.

As a rule, small-area plans should follow the format of all other chapters of the master plan, so that there is consistency throughout.

Helpful Hint: If you have pressing issues or concerns regarding specific areas or neighborhoods within the community, or if there is a need to present detailed information at the neighborhood level, then include a neighborhood plan in the master plan. If this is not the case, it is probably not needed. Including this plan requires a commitment to collect and map more information than would otherwise be needed at the community-wide scale.

11. Community Design

This section is intended to identify positive physical attributes in a municipality and provide design goals and policies for planning in specific areas, to guide private and public development.

A community design section is a relatively new concept for master plans. Most community design plans are prepared for specific areas within a community, such as its downtown, or specific transportation corridors. Community design deals with the built environment and its overall appearance, function, and quality. It seeks to enhance and improve the visual and physical quality of a place through design techniques and architectural treatments. A charrette is an excellent example of a practical community design exercise (for more information about charrettes, see Chapter 8, “Implementation,” and Chapter 10, Tools and Techniques”).“ Participation in a charrette or similar community design exercise typically results in a community design plan, which would ideally fit into this section of the master plan.

The community design section affords an opportunity within a master plan to consider and recommend the development of community-wide appearance standards and/or specific design guidelines for buildings, street corridors, neighborhoods, historic districts, and downtown areas, as needed. These standards or guidelines can then be incorporated into site plan or historic district regulations.

The main emphasis of this section, however, should be directed toward identifying the positive

attributes, features, buildings, and spaces that make up a community. Design goals and policies for development, redevelopment, or restoration can then be generated from this information.

Helpful Hint: *While the community design section in a master plan is optional, it is recommended that it be included if a community is concerned about its overall character and appearance. As part of the development of this section, be prepared to include the cost of design professionals in your work plan. If your community has specific community design plans already in place, these plans can be summarized and/or referenced in this section.*

12. Housing

This section assesses local housing conditions and projects future housing needs of residents at all income levels and of all ages in the municipality and the region, as identified in the regional housing needs assessment performed by the regional planning commission pursuant to RSA 36:47, II, and integrates the availability of human services with other planning undertaken by the community.

Housing is one of the most important elements of a master plan, after the vision and land use sections. It is directly related to economic as well as population conditions. The provision of adequate housing is a primary need in every community. If a community desires to have economic growth, housing will be needed for residents of differing income levels, both single-family and multi-family, and for purchase or rent. The housing section presents a useful picture of the community's current housing capacity and demand and what sort of housing will be needed and where it should go in the future.

The housing analysis typically begins by identifying changes to the community's housing supply and composition over the past decade or so. Data is also presented regarding selected characteristics of the housing stock, in order to evaluate its adequacy and identify needed improvements. Typical housing characteristics and issues addressed in this section include existing housing supply, changes in housing mix (single-family, multi-family,

manufactured), housing conditions, housing costs and affordable housing, and potential housing growth within the community (housing projections).

The organization of the housing section should begin with an overview of the current housing characteristics of your community, as listed above. It should then consider future conditions based on population and housing projections and wrap up with a summary and recommendations. It is important that the housing section identify the housing goals of your community.

These goals should address a number of factors, such as the demand for land for housing construction versus other land use needs, the provision of a variety of housing types at a range of different costs, sustaining a rate of growth that does not overwhelm municipal/school services, considering the housing needs of all age groups within the community, and maintaining the existing character of the community.

Additionally the housing section should address the issue of affordability. The community's fair share of low- and moderate-income housing can be obtained from the regional planning commission's housing needs assessment. New Hampshire's planning laws require, for the purpose of assisting municipalities in complying with RSA 674:2 III (m), that each regional planning commission compile an assessment of regional housing needs for persons and families of all levels of income (see RSA 36:47 II.). This regional housing needs assessment must be updated every five years and made available to all municipalities in the planning region.

There is also a new method for determining a community's fair share of low and moderate income housing, based on the New Hampshire Housing Needs Assessment prepared for the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority (NHFFA) by Bruce C. Mayberry, Planning Consultant, dated April 25, 2003, and revised July

17, 2003. (Information about this method and proportionate distribution of housing in municipalities is contained in Chapter 10 of this hand-

book, “Tools and Techniques.”)

Helpful Hint: *It is highly recommended that a housing section be included in your master plan, because housing is directly affected by population growth and economic conditions. This section is also directly related to the development of a future land use plan and map. The housing section can stand alone in a master plan, or it can be combined with the community’s population demographics.*

13. Implementation

This section is a long-range action program consisting of specific actions, time frames, descriptions of land development regulations to be adopted, and procedures, and allocating responsibilities, which the municipality may use to monitor and measure the effectiveness of each section of the plan.

The purpose of the implementation section is to organize all the recommendations and actions of the master plan into a manageable implementation program. In order for your plan to be successful, an effective implementation strategy must be established. This can be accomplished in several ways.

The standard technique is to prepare an overall spreadsheet identifying each action and recommendation by category or topic and including the party responsible for its implementation and the timeframe – short-term (0 to 3 years), mid-term (4 to 6) and long-term (8 to 10). The resulting table then contains recommendations and actions that are scheduled based on their implementation priority. This provides the community with an overall picture of who is responsible for carrying out recommendations and when action should be taken. This table can also be helpful when preparing a 6-year capital improvement program (CIP).

Another approach is to prepare a narrative implementation section that identifies all the issues and recommended actions by topic, and includes, at the end of each narrative, a separate implementation table with the recommended action, time frame, and party responsible for implementation. The end result is that the plan will contain a num-

ber of small, individual tables versus one large, overall table.

After you have finished this section, one of your most important management tasks is to notify all the parties identified as being responsible for one or more specific implementation actions. Too often, once the plan has been completed, it is distributed with no mention of the need for follow-up or monitoring. This is a critical error that should be avoided.

Helpful Hint: *An implementation section is a fundamental part of any master plan. Without this section, no master plan would be complete. It is strongly encouraged that copies of the adopted master plan be forwarded to all the parties responsible for its implementation. This will help to ensure that these parties have been informed of their implementation responsibilities. Additionally, it is important that all the appropriate implementation actions and recommendations in your plan be prioritized and included within your CIP, as applicable.*

Supplemental Master Plan Sections

In addition to the thirteen sections described above, other sections may be included in the master plan. For example, a section on construction materials summarizes all the known sources of construction materials available within your community such as road fill, sand and gravel deposits, and topsoil, including the locations and estimated extent of existing earth excavations that have been granted permits under RSA155-E, as well as reports filed pursuant to RSA155-E for non-permitted excavations.

It is becoming increasingly popular to include a section on smart growth and the application of smart growth principles in a community’s master plan, as provided for by RSA 674:2 I. The smart growth movement is growing across New Hampshire, and it is being promoted by the NH OEP as an important master planning concept (for more information about smart growth, see Chapter 11, “Planning Concepts and Themes”). The Governor’s Office and NH OEP have recent-

ly opened a new smart growth web site at: <http://www.nh.gov/osp/SmartGrowth/index.htm>.

The NH OEP has also produced an informative compact disc, “Achieving Smart Growth in New Hampshire,” dated April 2003 (**click here for link to the bibliography**). This disc illustrates the challenges of smart growth. It identifies eight basic principles and reviews three pilot communities that have considered smart growth options within their development and planning efforts

To supplement NH OEP’s work, included on this handbook’s accompanying CD-ROM is a smart growth audit, or checklist, that communities can use to review their policies, regulations, and other related community development programs for the potential application of smart growth principles (**click here to launch the smart growth audit**). This audit will also be helpful in generating the data you need to prepare a smart growth section in your master plan.

The number of sections and the content of a master plan can vary considerably depending upon the concerns, facilities, services, and infrastructure needs of your community. Obviously, the decision

of what to include is directly affected by how much information is needed and how much time and money you have to prepare your plan. Ultimately, what to include or not include should be based at least in part on

- your budget
- the kinds of issues and problems your community is facing
- your community’s goals and objectives
- your past planning experience (what was and was not included in your previous plan)
- estimated changes in your community’s overall economic base and future population (as measured by population and employment data)
- availability and suitability of land within your community to support future development (as measured by a land use survey and build-out analysis)
- adequacy of your community’s public facilities and services to meet the demands of future populations and new commercial/industrial development
- the planning approach selected and the type of master plan the board chooses to prepare